

IN THE CLAIMS:

Cancel Claims 1-8.

Amend Claims 22, 25-27, 29, and 32 as follows:

1.-8. (canceled)

9.-21. (canceled)

22. (currently amended) A computer system, comprising:

a storage controller;

a plurality of storage devices, each having a lateral storage director (LSD);

a communications link for communicating between the storage controller and the plurality of storage devices;

a host for commanding the storage controller to pass data files to or from one or more of the plurality of storage devices via the communications link; and ~~wherein~~

the LSDs in the plurality of storage devices also operate and communicate directly with each other over the communications link without requiring involvement of or communication with the storage controller or host such that the plurality of storage devices self-initiate tasks independently of the storage controller and the host.

23. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein each of the plurality of storage devices has its own storage device controller, and the LSDs are programs of computer commands usable by respective ones of the storage device controllers.

24. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein each of the LSDs are separately embodied as individual microprocessors that are physically separate from respective ones of the storage devices.

25. (currently amended) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein each LSD has a unique communications link address, [[and]] the LSDs accept queries directly from other ones of the LSDs via the communications link without involvement of the storage controller or the host, and the LSDs transfer data files directly to other storage devices that are not equipped with LSDs such that the LSDs issue host emulating commands.

26. (currently amended) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein each LSD includes a data file table and self-monitors a performance parameter on respective ones of the storage devices independently of and without communicating with the storage controller or the host.

27. (currently amended) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein each LSD determines an available storage space on respective ones of the storage devices independently of and without communicating with the storage controller or the host.

28. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 22, wherein the plurality of storage devices are selected from the group consisting of disk drives, tape drives, and optical drives.

29. (currently amended) A computer system, comprising:

- a storage controller;
- a plurality of storage devices, each having a lateral storage director (LSD);
- a communications link for communicating between the storage controller and the plurality of storage devices;
- a host for commanding the storage controller to pass data files to or from one or more of the plurality of storage devices via the communications link; ~~and wherein~~

the LSDs in the plurality of storage devices also operate and communicate directly with each other over the communications link without requiring involvement of or communication with the storage controller or host such that the plurality of storage devices self-initiate tasks independently of the storage controller and the host;[[,]] and

each LSD has a unique communications link address such that the LSDs accept queries directly from other ones of the LSDs via the communications link without involvement of the storage controller or the host, and the LSDs transfer data files directly to other storage devices that are not equipped with LSDs such that the LSDs issue host emulating commands[[.]]; and

each LSD determines an available storage space on respective ones of the storage devices independently of and without communicating with the storage controller or the host.

30. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 29, wherein each of the plurality of storage devices has its own storage device controller, and the LSDs are programs of computer commands usable by respective ones of the storage device controllers.

31. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 29, wherein each of the LSDs are separately embodied as individual microprocessors that are physically separate from respective ones of the storage devices.

32. (currently amended) A computer system according to Claim 29, wherein each LSD includes a data file table and self-monitors a performance parameter on respective ones of the storage devices independently of and without communicating with the storage controller or the host, the performance parameter being selected from the group consisting of available storage space, data traffic balance, seek duty cycle, and predictive failure indicators.

33. (previously presented) A computer system according to Claim 29, wherein the plurality of storage devices are selected from the group consisting of disk drives, tape drives, and optical drives.